

symbolic of the introverted and aggressive fierceness of a human self seeking to devour all life. The White Whale is the externalization of the inner focus of presumptuous selfhood, into which Ahab seeks to force the cracking moulds of the universe. Ishmael, on the contrary, represents the forthgoing virtue of innocent American selfhood which is not destroyed, or subjugated by evil, but is rather educated and redeemed by it. Ishmael's self works in a direction opposite to Ahab's, and is capable of the necessary withdrawal from its own limited possibility, and can place itself in the wider identity of the universe. On the mystic crest of the White Whale, which is discovered on the equator, and in the mid-profundities of the Pacific Ocean, Ahab and Ishmael become integrated into a single experience of transcendental selfhood. The neo-Adamic reorientation of Ishmael's personality is the most significant fulfilment of the quest for selfhood in American literature.

Henry James too, unconsciously, merged his consciousness of human experience into the native discourse of American selfhood. A most obvious illustration of the analogous nature of Henry James's problem is to be found in the narrative of the education of Lambert Strether. Strether's original American self is so exclusively cultivated to a point of fineness that no fresh idea or experience was ever capable of invading it. But his introverted self, being nurtured in the American grain of conscience, is by definition capable of opening out into a world of untried potentialities. In Europe, his focus of vision is shifted from its narrow, subjective centrality to the extensive horizons of the objective outer world of impersonal freedom. Strether's refinement is dramatised at a point where this shift in selfhood occurs, and it is thematically reinforced by the contrastive transformation of himself and Chad Newsome in mutually opposite movements of time and space. The diagrammatic representation of the Strether-Chad relationship is profoundly reminiscent of

the Ahab-Ishmael relationship, with the difference, that in Henry James's tale, there is the deepening irony of the reluctant adult growing young through wisdom, and the eager adolescent becoming old through experience. In fact, taken together as a single statement on the American self, Henry James's novels are unobtrusively identified with the classical American rather than the European tradition of literature. As Professor Spiller observes, "The back-trail of rejection had led into the heart of the American experience."¹